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Cuba assumes LatAm group presidency in diplomatic coup

SANTIAGO, Chile (AFP) - Cuba assumed the presidency of a key Latin American group here Monday, scoring a major diplomatic coup at a summit at which it urged regional integration and independence from the United States.

President Raul Castro, whose island nation is still languishing under a crippling 50-year-old US trade em-

bargo, formally took over the chairmanship of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) from summit host Chile.

The development, hailed by Argentine President Cristina Kirchner as a sign of the "changing times," marks Cuba's full regional reintegration and represents a major diplomatic coup for Castro.

"We are building the ideal of a diverse Latin American and Caribbean region united in a common space of political independence and sovereignty over our enormous natural resources to advance toward sustainable development, regional integration," the 81-year-old Cuban leader said in his address.

Set up in Caracas in December 2011 at the behest of Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, CELAC groups all nations from across the Americas except the United States and Canada.

Chavez, who is undergoing cancer treatment in Havana and has not been seen in public for weeks, sent a message of support to his Cuban ally to the summit.

Continued on pg 6

Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands to abdicate in favour of son



Dutch Queen Beatrix with her son Crown Prince Willem Alexander

THE HAGUE (AFP) - Queen Beatrix of the Netherlands announced Monday that she would abdicate in favour of her son Crown Prince Willem Alexander at the end of April after 33 years in power.

"It is with the greatest of confidence, that I will hand over the throne on April 30 to my son, Willem Alexander, Prince of Orange," Beatrix told national television, using the official title of the heir apparent.

The queen, who is to turn 75 on Thursday, said her birthday and the 200-year anniversary of the monarchy in 2013 "were the reason for me to step down".

"I'm standing down because public service is too heavy for me, because of the belief that responsibility for our country should be in the hands of a new generation," she said.

Liberal Prime Minister Mark Rutte spoke immediately after the queen.

"She has always done her utmost for Dutch society, being visible and with enormous energy," Rutte said.

"She has grown into a Dutch icon," he said, also paying homage to Willem Alexander.

"He and Princess Maxima are fully prepared for the task," Rutte said. "They will serve our country with devotion."

Beatrix's much-loved mother Juliana also abdicated, in 1980, when her daughter stepped into her shoes at age 42.

Beatrix's abdication ends more than 100 years of female reign on the Dutch

throne.

Willem Alexander, 45, will become the first Dutch king since Willem III, who reigned until his death in 1890.

The announcement was "totally unexpected," royal expert Reinildis van Ditzhuyzen told the NOS public broadcaster.

"An abdication takes a lot of organisation," Van Ditzhuyzen added.

Continued on pg 2

NOTICE:



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Minister of Labor to hold information sessions on changes in Labor Laws

In his attempt to make certain that everyone, and particularly all stakeholders, understand and are fully cognizant of the changes in the labor laws, the Minister of Labor is organizing a series of informative lectures. The first of these lectures is scheduled for January 31st at 5:00 pm in the Holiday Inn Hotel.

The Minister has begun the process of modernizing 5 of our local labor laws, two of which have already been deliberated and approved in Parliament. As soon as these laws are implemented, employees will receive benefits and guarantees that the changes have brought.

The government's goal behind these informative lectures is to inform and dialogue with the groups and stakeholders of the labor

force, and to explain as clearly as possible the changes in the laws.

These sessions will be led by Anselmo Pontilius, Government Mediator, Director of DPL and DAO, who will inform the unions so as to bring about an upgrading among our unions.

Because the changes in the labor laws are so far reaching, it is essential that information be transmitted as extensively as possible, and to address all questions that may be raised.

This first meeting will be for all directors of human resources in the public and private sectors, as well as all union leaders. Hence, a special invitation is hereby extended to these persons to attend this upcoming meeting on Thursday, January 31st.

New Pre-Clearance facility for Aruba in the works

One of the government's visions is to succeed in getting a pre-clearance facility here for travels to European countries. Sometime ago the government presented this concept to Holland to explore the possibility for bringing such a facility to Aruba. In the meantime, work on this field is moving along steadily in Aruba. A work group has been installed together with Holland to explore all the judicial and practical aspects to be able to achieve such a facility in Aruba.

During the Prime Minister's recent visit to Holland, he met with both Dutch Minister of Justice Opstelten and Dutch Secretary of State Teeven on this topic. Both

Dutch officials are supportive of Aruba's desire for a pre-clearance facility to Europe. Such a facility will definitely benefit the concept of a Gateway to Europe that Aruba wants to realize.

What Aruba wants is a unique system in the field of travel to and from Europe. The system used at Schiphol is for citizens of the European Union only. Aruba wants a general system. Aruba's system should service everyone with a passport containing a chip. This is because people of all nationalities travel to Aruba. By means of a pilot project we believe we can achieve this.

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Queen Beatrix of The Netherlands to abdicate in favour of son

Continued from pg 1



Crown Prince Willem Alexander and Princess Maxima of the Netherlands pose with their daughters Princess Ariane, Princess Amalia and Princess Alexia

State broadcaster NOS began broadcasting footage from significant moments during the queen's soon after her speech was announced.

Beatrix chose to turn her palace into a "palace of work" in The Hague, the seat of government of the country with a strong work ethic.

But when renovations were announced at Beatrix's distinctive octagonal-shaped Drakensteijn castle southeast of Amsterdam in 2006, some saw a herald of her abdication. Beatrix's German-born husband prince Klaus died in 2002 aged 76.

Dutch festivities during the coronation will be tinged by concerns for the health of Willem-Alexander's younger brother Prince Friso, who has been in a coma since being hit by an avalanche in Austria in February 2012.

Contrary to her mother's unobtrusive style of rule, Beatrix refused to be relegated to ribbon-cutting; changing the mode of address from "madam" to "majesty", and transforming one of the royal

palaces in The Hague, the seat of government, into a working palace.

She received heads of state in her affable though formal manner and met weekly with successive prime ministers to discuss matters of government, earning the nickname "chief executive officer of the Netherlands".

She also signed laws and

played an important role in Dutch politics by appointing the so-called "formateur" who explores possibilities for coalition government after general elections.

Last year's elections in which Prime Minister Rutte was elected to head government for a second time, marked the first time she was not actively involved in the formateur's appointment, marking a step back from active politics.

Future king Willem Alexander has worked hard to polish his image since his beer-drinking student days when he was known as "Prince Pils".

The crown prince is a pilot and member of the International Olympic Committee and his image has improved since he married Argentine Maxima Zorreguieta in 2002.

The vivacious Princess Maxima, 41, has won the hearts of the Dutch, despite her father's past as an official of the Argentine junta in the 1970s.

Maxima's father was not allowed to attend his daughter's wedding in the Netherlands, and her mother also stayed away out of solidarity.

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Information sessions ... Continued from pg 2

Aruba wants to go even a step further by coupling the ABC (Automated Border Control) system to a boarding pass of the passenger. The so called SSB (Self Service Boarding). The passenger who passes through the automatic doors gets his boarding pass at that moment. In order to achieve this, there must be a good cooperation with Holland. The support of Holland is already there and the contacts with the commission of the European Union have also been established.

The workgroup consists of, among others, executives of the immigration of Aruba and Holland, justice, IASA, DIA. These government officials will be part of a symposium of executives of Tripple A, KLM Holland, KLM Aruba, the airport and Schiphol Group. An expert from Frontex with offices in Warsaw will also be a part of the two-days symposium.

This group's interesting meeting slogan is "Don't talk, Do". Their focus now is to order the automatic passengerdoors for Aruba as soon as possible.



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Joe asked, and Angela said "yes".

Next was the engagement photos on Aruba, where Joe proposed. Two years ago, his sister Gloria, and George, who is now her husband, also got engaged here.

Diane Keijzer photographed Gloria and Georges special engagement vacation, so naturally she also was asked to do a photo session for Joe and Angela also to capture their happiness as well.

Both couples are thoroughly enjoying what Aruba has to offer and, of course, each

others company while sharing their double suite at the Marriott Surf Club. Congratulations, stay happy, chive on, and we'll see you at your "home away from home" next year.

Photos by Diane Keijzer

Apple updates software for iPhone, iPad

SAN FRANCISCO (AFP) - Apple said Monday it was releasing updated mobile software for the iPhone and iPad which makes it easier for users to get on high-speed networks.

The iOS 6.1 version, which updates the one released last year, includes Apple's own maps program which drew scorn from users because of numerous glitches, and which Apple has pledged to fix.

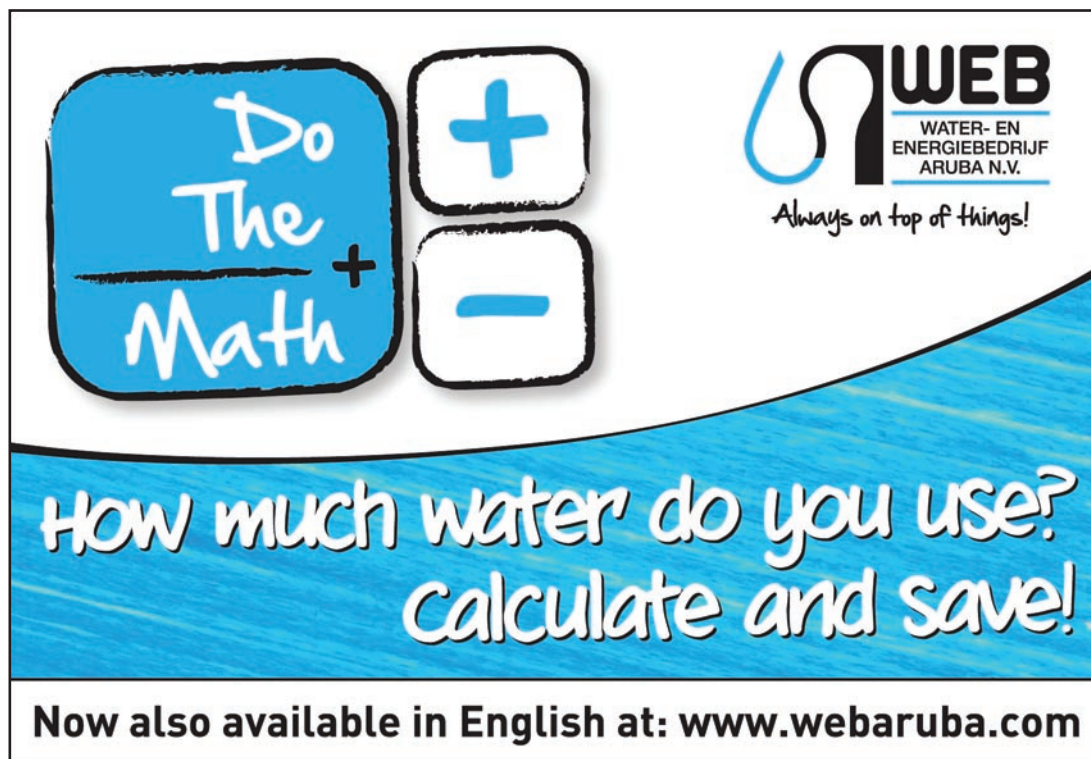
The new software allows 36 iPhone carriers and 23 iPad

carriers around the world to provide access to the faster LTE networks offered in many locations.

The update includes support for Apple's voice assistant Siri in more languages, an Apple statement said.

The statement noted that it will include maps "with Apple-designed cartography, turn-by-turn navigation and Flyover view."

The new iOS 6.1 is available as a free software update.



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Aura Casino: "Where players win"



Aura Casino at the Occidental Grand is the place to play right now! The cash prizes are flowing out and happy players are leaving with big smiles on their faces.

Recently, **Mrs. Vivian Petropoulos** found her lucky streak in the newly renovated Aura Casino "where players win."

She won a total amount of **\$2,724.93** at the Aura Casino at the Occidental Grand while playing on the brand new slot machine "Mega Pay."

Another happy winner was **Mrs. Dorota Kudzian** who also found her lucky streak at the Aura Casino.

She won a total amount of

\$1,556.96 while playing on the brand new slot machine "Quick Hit"

Mrs. Barb Bova also decided to join the winners. She won a total amount of **\$1,270.-** at the Aura Casino on the slot-machine "Sheng Yeng."

Staff & Management want to congratulate all the lucky winners and invite everyone to come and win at the Aura Casino at the Occidental Grand: **"Where players win."**

The center of Aruba has definitely shifted here at the Aura Casino, which happens to be smack-dab in the middle of all the action on Palm Beach.

Come and try your luck, maybe you can be one of Aura Casino's next lucky winners!

John and Joan celebrate their 60th anniversary on beautiful Aruba



Joan and John Lademan from Cutchogue, Long Island, New York, recently celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on Jan. 24th, at the Chalet Suisse Restaurant. This is their 16th year visiting Aruba and their 15th year staying at La Cabana. Celebrating with them were their granddaughter Erin Lademan and Chuck Fick.

Photo by Yves

S.African kings come with \$73m price tag

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) - South Africa's 10 kings and thousands of aristocrats cost the state a regal \$73 million (650 million rand, 54 million euros) last year, local media reported Monday.

The price tag was spent on salaries and benefits for 10 kings, 829 senior traditional leaders and 5,311 local chiefs, Beeld newspaper reported. Each king earned a yearly salary of over \$100,000, while provinces allocated additional benefits.

Zulu King Goodwill Zwelithini received \$6.6 million from the eastern KwaZulu-Natal province, and asked an extra \$2 million to build a palace for the youngest of his six wives. He has 27 children.

Other provinces paid for luxury vehicles, medical aid and household costs.

CARNIVAL SCHEDULE

FEBRUARY

FRI. FEB. 1st

7:30 p.m. - **Aruba's 59th Carnival Queen Election and Coronation**

Aruba's 19th Mrs. Carnival Election
(Aruba's Entertainment Center)

SAT. FEB 2nd

1 p.m. - **Children's Carnival Parade Noord**
(Noord Route: From Bubali Field straight to Centro di Bario Noord)

8 p.m. - **Aruba Tivoli Lightning Parade**

SUN. FEB 3 - Grand Children's Parade
(Oranjestad)

We Get Mail



To the Editor:

My wife and I love spending time in Aruba, having first visited on our honeymoon 33 years ago. Now semiretired, we've purchased a property and spend 4 months a year on this idyllic isle. The local friends we've made make this place our second home and a recent event further enhances that feeling. Recently I was at the tax office renewing my car plates. I always try to remember to carry my mobile and after receiving my new plates noticed I didn't have my phone with me. Retracing my steps at the tax office produced no phone, so I assumed I had failed to bring it with me. After a few more errands and grocery shopping I headed back to our condo. As I stated that I thought I didn't bring the phone along, but much to my surprise it had been delivered to our door. Mr. Calixto Baez had found the phone at the tax office. After scrolling through the contacts he noticed the name, Carlos, our property manager whom he knew. Carlos confirmed that it was my phone and Mr. Baez graciously drove to Eagle beach and delivered the phone to our property manager who returned it to my wife. Mr. Baez refused any reward saying my thank you was reward enough. I plan on passing on this act of kindness through actions of my own as Mr. Baez's thoughtfulness confirms our commitment to Aruba and it's wonderful people.

Regards,

Roy Duxstad

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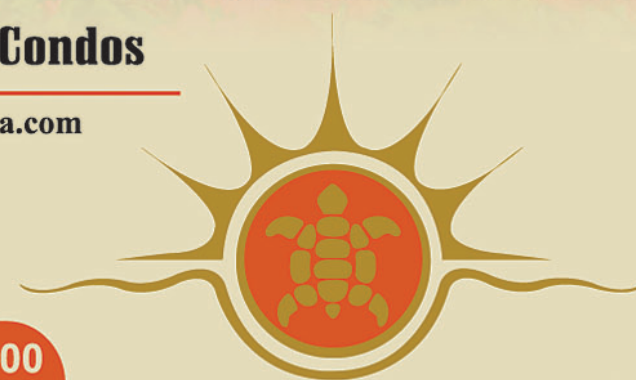
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'Hansel & Gretel' tops N. America box office

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - A horror-movie twist on the classic "Hansel and Gretel" fairy tale shot straight to the top slot at the North American weekend box office, industry figures showed Monday.

"Hansel & Gretel: Witch Hunters," in which the once lost brother and sister have grown up to become grim-faced bounty hunters, debuted in first place with \$19.7 million, according to box office

tracker Exhibitor Relations.

The supernatural thriller screamed past fellow horror flick "Mama," which fell into the second slot in its second weekend in theaters.

"Mama," in which a shadowy being trails two young children rescued after being lost in the woods when their parents died, took in \$13.1 million.

Oscar-tipped bin Laden manhunt movie "Zero Dark Thirty" slipped to third place

with \$9.7 million, followed by romantic comedy "Silver Linings Playbook," boosted by its Golden Globes success in mid-January, on \$9.4 million.

Another new release, "Parker," starring Jason Statham and Jennifer Lopez as an unlikely pair working together on a heist, opened in fifth place, with \$7 million in its opening weekend.

Meanwhile, Quentin Tarantino's blood-soaked spaghetti

Western tribute "Django Unchained," which took home two Globes and four Oscar nominations, rose to sixth place, earning slightly more than \$4.9 million at the box office.

That put it just barely ahead of the third new release to open in the top 10 this week. Star-studded "Movie 43," a comedy featuring interconnected short films that follow three kids' search for the most banned

movie in the world, earned \$4.8 million in ticket sales for seventh place.

Trailing just behind was Sean Penn action flick "Gangster Squad," with \$4.3 million, and musical adaptation "Les Miserables," which took in \$4.2 million, in eighth and ninth spot respectively.

Rounding out the top 10 was crime drama "Broken City," earning just over \$4 million in its second week in theaters.

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Mainstreet Downtown Aruba

Italy must compensate families of 1980 plane disaster

ROME (AFP) - Italy's highest appeal court Monday ordered the government to compensate the families of those who died in a mysterious aviation disaster near Sicily more than three decades ago.

Eighty-one people were

killed when the Itavia DC-9 aircraft, en route from Bologna to Palermo, exploded on June 27, 1980, near the island of Ustica, off the coast of Sicily.

Though the cause of the disaster remains unclear, the court said the Italian state

"clearly had an obligation to ensure the safety of flights" through sufficient civil and military radar monitoring.

The court returned the case to the lower appeals court in Palermo to determine the amount of compensation due to the families of three of the victims who initiated the court case. The families of other victims later followed suit.

In 2007, the highest court of appeal acquitted several high-ranking Italian military officials of charges that they hid vital evidence related to the disaster.

The cause of the disaster remains unclear.

Several Italian experts believe the plane may have been hit accidentally by US and French fighter jets chasing one or two Libyan aircraft trailing the DC-9 to avoid radar detection.

Another theory, also involving the fighter jets, is that one of them crashed into the aircraft.

said in a joint statement.

WhatsApp has taken steps to resolve several privacy issues by implementing many of the privacy watchdogs' recommendations.

"However, outstanding issues remain to be fully addressed," the watchdogs said.

The coordinated Canadian-Dutch investigation is a global first, and "marks a milestone in global privacy protection" in an "increasingly online, mobile and borderless world," noted Canadian Privacy Commissioner Jennifer Stoddart.

WhatsApp messaging breached privacy laws: authorities

OTTAWA (AFP) - WhatsApp's mobile messaging service used by hundreds of millions of customers worldwide breached privacy laws in at least two countries, a joint Canadian-Dutch probe concluded Monday.

The California-based mobile app developer violated "certain internationally accepted privacy principles, mainly in relation to the retention, safeguard, and disclosure of personal data," Canada's privacy commissioner and the Dutch Data Protection Authority (CBP)

Obama and Biden Meet With Law Enforcement Officials



U.S. President Barack Obama (2R) along with Vice President Joe Biden (L) meet with representatives from the Major Cities Chiefs Association and Major Counties Sheriffs Association to discuss the Administration's plans to reduce gun violence in America at the White House January 28, 2013 in Washington, DC. President Obama called on Congress to act on passing laws that restrict access to assault weapons. (AFP photo)

Cuba assumes LatAm group presidency...

Continued from pg 1

"Latin America and the Caribbean are telling the United States with a single voice that all attempts to isolate Cuba have failed and will fail," the leftist firebrand said in a message read out by his vice president Nicolas Maduro.

"We have pledged to give all our support to Cuba which, beginning in this summit, assumes the presidency of the community in an act of justice after more than 50 years of resistance to the criminal imperial embargo," Chavez said.

In his remarks, the Cuban leader praised Chavez's "extraordinary leadership" and the Venezuelan people for "setting an outstanding example of loyalty, determination and unity ... in spite of their pain and concern over the health" of their president.

Castro also seized the occasion to warn the region that "transnational corporations, basically Americans, will not renounce their control over strategic energy, water and mineral resources nearing depletion."

In another dig at Washington, he said "our community will not be complete without Puerto Rico, a truly Latin American and Caribbean sister nation submitted to (US) colonial domination." Puerto Rico is a self-governing US possession.

And he expressed gratitude

for the region's support for Argentine sovereignty over the British-ruled Falklands and its opposition to the US trade embargo on Cuba.

Meanwhile the secretary general of the Organization of American States (OAS), Jose Miguel Insulza of Chile, said CELAC was not a "threat" to the OAS -- which includes the United States and Canada -- but rather a "useful component".

"They are two distinct (organizations) and not meant to compete with each other," he said. "The OAS has a hemispheric role, includes also countries of North America, which make up a third of the population of the region."

The OAS kicked out communist-ruled Cuba in 1962 at the height of the Cold War. The expulsion was rescinded in 2009, but Cuba has refused to return.

Insulza stressed that he could not question CELAC's decision to hand its chairmanship to Cuba.

"It is not my organization. I have always believed that the inclusion of Cuba and co-operation with Cuba are better than exclusion and isolation, to promote democracy," he noted.

In a balancing act agreed in Caracas when CELAC was created, Cuba assumes the presidency for the first year and Costa Rica for the second.

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International News

Assad says Syria army has upper hand

BEIRUT (AFP) - Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said his troops have gained the upper hand against rebels in the 22-month conflict and could win in "two weeks" should Turkey stop its support for insurgents, a Lebanese newspaper reported.

Assad emphasised that the military had prevented the opposition from taking full control of any of the country's 14 provinces.

The rebels' "playground is limited to some border areas with Turkey, Jordan and Lebanon, and some pockets in the countryside of the capital, which are being dealt with," he said.

Since the Syrian uprising erupted in March 2011 and later turned into a civil war, the regime has accused Ankara of funding and providing a safe haven to rebel fighters.

Assad said that "armed groups financed from abroad have been dealt severe blows of late."

"The United States has included the Al-Nusra Front on its list of terrorist organisations, and this move will be followed by the full liquidation of this Al-Qaeda branch."

Assad said Russia -- which

still holds military contracts with Syria and opposes foreign intervention in the conflict that the UN says has killed more than 60,000 people -- will not withdraw support. Moscow "defends itself, not the Syrian regime," he said of his key ally, the newspaper reported.

Russian Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev acknowledged on Sunday that Assad's chances of political survival were shrinking by the day and said the Syrian leader had made a "grave, perhaps fatal error" in refusing to negotiate with opposition early on.

Assad told the visitors that during talks with UN peace envoy to Syria Lakhdar Brahimi in December, the diplomat had asked him about the possibility of stepping down before the end of his term in 2014 as part of a transitional agreement.

"The president cut off the discussion and made it clear that the only way to end the conflict was by resolving the situation on the ground, which is improving by the day in favour of the regime," the visitors said, according to Al-Akhbar.

Brazil buries first inferno victims as arrests made



SANTA MARIA (AFP) - Brazilian police arrested Monday the owner of the nightclub where 231 party-goers perished in a blaze and two musicians who starred in an ill-fated pyrotechnic show.

Authorities announced the arrests as Brazil began three days of mourning following Sunday's tragedy, which forced the cancellation of an event to mark the run up to the country's hosting of the football World Cup.

In addition to the arrests, a warrant was issued for another owner of the Kiss club, police official Michele Vimmermann said, as distraught relatives laid wreaths outside the venue in the southern city of Santa Maria.

Vimmermann said those in custody were nightclub co-owner Elissandro Sphor and two members of the Gurizada Fandangueira band. The fire broke out at around 2:00 am (0400 GMT) when the club was hosting a university party.

Described as the country's second deadliest, the inferno allegedly erupted during the group's performance, with some survivors saying its lead singer lit a firework that could have triggered the inferno.

Allegations also surfaced that the club lacked the necessary emergency exits, that at least one fire extinguisher did not work and, according to firefighters, that its safety license had expired in August.

As friends and family members bid farewell to their loved ones, officials revised the death toll from 233 to 231 and said at least 100 others remained hospitalized, 80 of them in serious condition.

As dawn broke, collective wakes for 24 of the dead were held at the town's sports center, followed by the first funerals in Santa Maria -- a college town -- and the surrounding district, home to many of the city's students.

About 180 people perished in the bathrooms, suffocating amid the chaos, said military police captain Edi Paulo Garcia.

Meanwhile, some of those who made it through recalled a night of mayhem.

Amid a black cloud of toxic smoke, panicking survivors trampled each other in scenes reminiscent of a "horror movie," 21-year-old Kelly Rebelo de Silva told AFP.

The deaths sent shock waves through Brazil -- which is due to host the 2014 World Cup -- .In the wake of the disaster, the authorities called off an event dubbed "500 Days until the World Cup," planned for Monday in the federal capital Brasilia.

The town of Santa Maria lies west of Porto Alegre, one of the World Cup host cities.

The inferno is Brazil's second worst. A fire at a circus in Niteroi in 1961 left 503 people dead.



NEWARK (AFP) - Immigrants take the oath of allegiance to the United States during a naturalization ceremony at the district office of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) on January 28, 2013 in Newark, New Jersey. Some 38,000 immigrants became U.S. citizens at the Newark office alone in 2012.



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Health & Living

EU drug agency to review safety of new-generation Pill



PARIS (AFP) - The European Medicines Agency (EMA) on Monday said it would review safety data for third- and fourth-generation birth control pills, responding to French concern that these contraceptives may cause dangerous blood clots.

The agency, describing oral contraceptives as carrying only "a very rare risk" of clots, said a watchdog panel would assess

whether European guidelines for using later versions of the Pill should be changed.

The third-generation Pill was introduced in the 1990s, and the 4th generation in the last decade.

It pointed to evidence that their use led to higher risk of blood clots compared with older versions of the Pill, although the risk in absolute terms is small.

France wants guidelines changed so that doctors no longer prescribe later-generation pills as a first option.

They contain synthetic versions of the female hormone progesterone, which the makers say avoid some of the side-effects of older formulations.

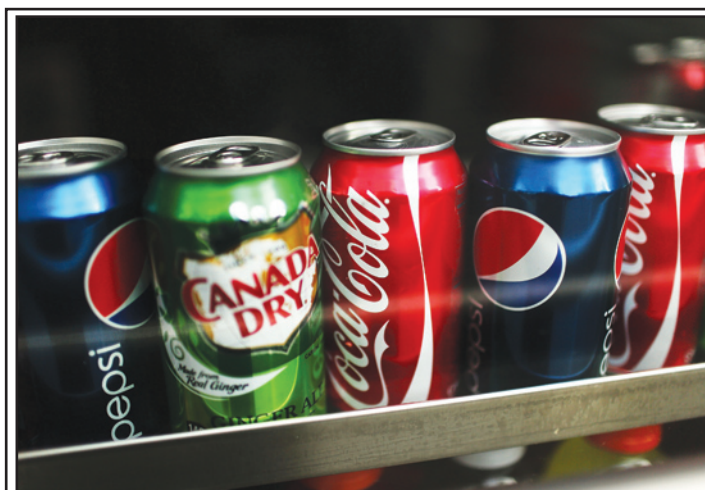
A Danish study published in the British Medical Journal (BMJ) in 2011 found women who took one of the newer

types of Pill ran twice the risk of developing blood clots in the veins than those who used older-generation drugs.

Compared with non-users of the Pill, the risk of a clot was between three and six times higher.

Clots formed in the veins can break up and be transported to the heart or lungs and may be fatal.

The storm in France was triggered partly by the case of a 25-year-old woman, Marion Larat, who was left badly handicapped by a stroke that, in a lawsuit, she attributed to a later-generation pill made by German firm Bayer.



NEW YORK (AFP) - Cans of soda are displayed on a shelf in New York City. As American consumers continue to shift to water, coffee, and other drinks, soda sales have fallen in the U.S. Soda sales in volume dropped 1.8% last year to \$28.70 billion. In New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg has launched a campaign and passed a ban on extra large-size sodas, which his administration has linked to diabetes and obesity.

Japan eases restrictions on US beef

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The United States on Monday welcomed news that Japan has eased restrictions on beef imposed due to concerns over mad cow disease, easing a decade-long row between the allies.

US officials said that Japan -- formerly the largest buyer of US beef -- had agreed to allow the import of the meat from cattle slaughtered at up to 30 months old, higher than the earlier safety limit of 20 months.

Norihisa Tamura, Japan's health, labor and welfare minister, announced last week that Tokyo planned to raise the age limit for beef subject to final approval from a council of the ministry.

Japan had been the largest

buyer of US beef until 2003, when like several Asian nations it stopped all imports after mad cow disease was detected in an American herd.

The issue quickly became a top item on the agenda between the United States and Japan, with US lawmakers from US farm states demanding that the close ally open up its market.

The United States has pursued quieter diplomacy on the issue since 2006 when Japan, seeking to ease US concerns, agreed to allow beef from cattle under 20 months.

Australia has since replaced the United States as the largest source of beef in Japan, with some retailers highlighting to consumers that they do not buy from the United States.

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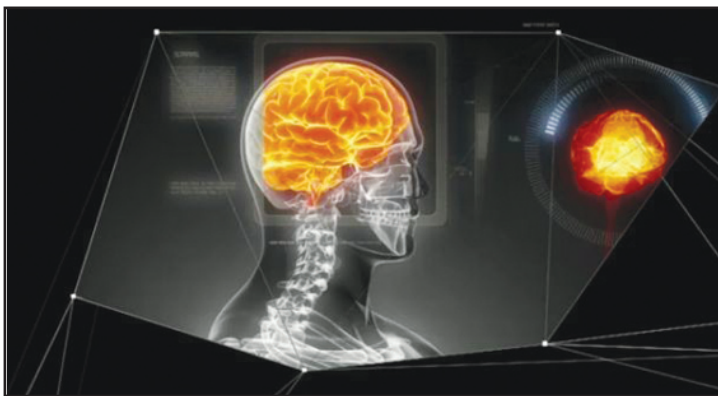
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Sci-Tech

Graphene, 'Human Brain Project' get 2-bn-euro funds



BRUSSELS (AFP) - Research into the wonder material graphene and the neurochemistry of the human brain will receive up to two billion euros (\$2.68 billion) in funding, the biggest research award of its kind in history, the European Commission said.

The two areas are beneficiaries of the Future Emerging Technology (FET) Flagship programme, described as an "X-Factor for science", whose winners were chosen by leading scientists, a Nobel prize winner and industrialists.

The money, amounting to a billion euros for each initiative, will be allocated over 10 years, the Commission said.

The winners will receive up to 54 million euros from the Commission this year, while "further funding will come from subsequent EU research framework programmes, private partners

including universities, member states and industry," the European Union executive said in a press release.

The EU is to provide half the total funding and the rest will be matched by national governments, industry and private backers, it spelled out.

Graphene, discovered less than a decade ago, is a sheet of carbon that is one atom thick.

It is touted as having huge potential, with superior conductivity, mechanical strength and optical purity than other materials. It is likely to replace many uses for silicon.

Described by Commission vice president Neelie Kroes as a "revolutionary material (produced) using just a pencil and Scotch tape", graphene is now "on the verge of spawning a new industry," she said.

The Human Brain Project, meanwhile, seeks to simulate

the cells, chemistry and connectivity of the brain in a supercomputer, the goal being to better comprehend the brain's functions and development.

The hope is to find new treatments for brain diseases such as Alzheimer's and enhance "artificial intelligence" computing.

Underlined Kroes: "Europe's position as a knowledge superpower depends on thinking the unthinkable and exploiting the best ideas."

"This multi-billion competition rewards home-grown scientific breakthroughs and shows that when we are ambitious we can develop the best research in Europe."



Apple, Android have smartphone 'duopoly'

WASHINGTON (AFP) - Android and Apple smartphones captured a whopping 92 percent of global sales in the fourth quarter, giving the two systems an effective duopoly, a research firm said Monday.

Strategy Analytics said global smartphone shipments grew 38 percent annually to reach 217 million units in the fourth quarter, to bring annual sales to 700 million.

Android, the free operating system developed by Google, grabbed 70 percent of the market in the final three

months of the year, while Apple's iOS used on its iPhone held 22 percent.

The news bodes ill for rivals like BlackBerry maker Research In Motion, which is launching its new platform this year, and Microsoft, which is pushing its Windows Phone system.

The survey noted that global shipment growth slowed from 64 percent in 2011 to 43 percent in 2012, as regions such as North America and Western Europe matured.



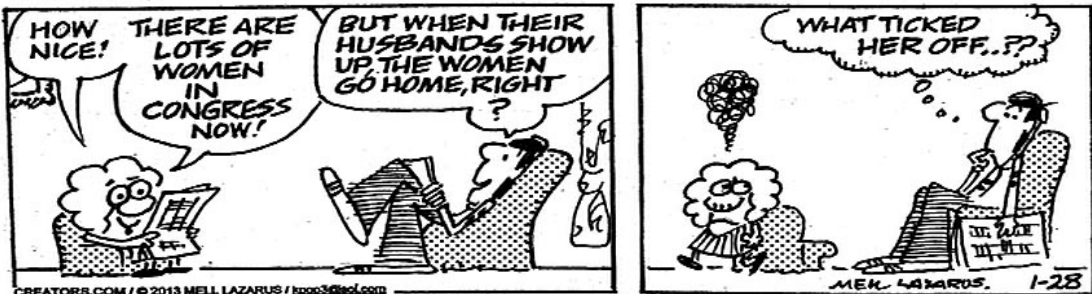
LUND (AFP) : A dung beetle (Scarabaeus Satyrus) crawls over a ball of mud on January 25, 2013 at the University of Lund, Sweden, where scientists have proven how the insects use the Milky Way to orientate themselves. According to the university the researchers found that dung beetles can transport their dung balls along straight paths under a starlit sky, but lose the ability under overcast conditions.

COMICS

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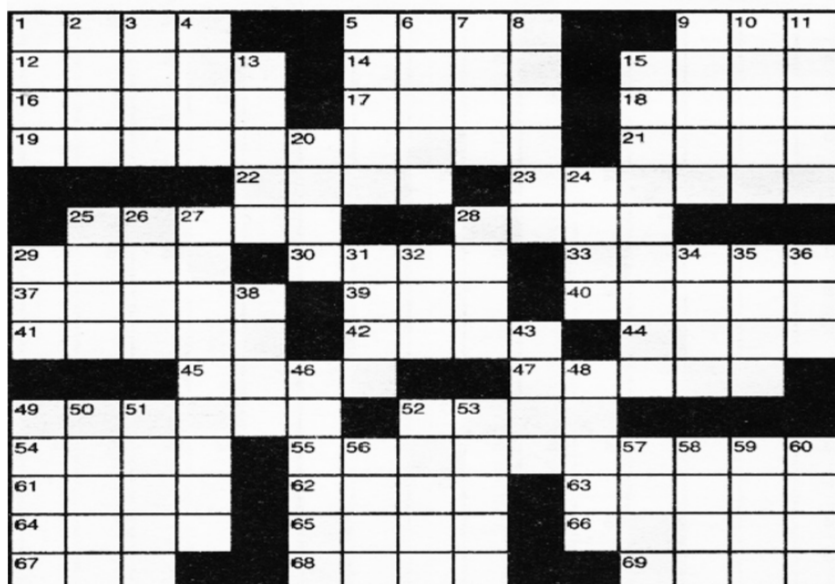
THAT'S HYSTERICAL

ACROSS

1. Cat's weapon
5. Baby's cry
9. Submissions to an ed.
12. Of hearing
14. Devotion recipient
15. Deed: Fr.
16. "The Glass Menagerie" heroine
17. Paul's late-night buddy
18. Craving
19. Comics section
21. Muses number
22. Harlem's river
23. Roscoe of tennis
25. Saute anew
28. Glimpse
29. Sauce Bolognese
30. Pack, maritime-style
33. Ease
37. Maine university town
39. Beer's relative
40. Pirate
41. Didn't exist
42. Mrs. Dick Tracy
44. NPR's Totenberg
45. Luke Skywalker's teacher
47. Gardeners' banes
49. Tan fabric made of wild silk
52. Bedouin's headdress cord
54. Actor Morales

DOWN

55. Counterfeit currency
61. Blend cake batter
62. On the "Bounty"
63. Tinker to ___ to Chance
64. Store drawer
65. Main part
66. Get the Prell out
67. Scand. airline
68. Does wrong
69. Hind
7. Relocate
8. Warnings
9. Sausalito's county
10. Actress Hasso
11. Herd member
13. Stratum
15. Humerus's neighbor
20. Forks over the dough
24. On ___ with (equal to)
25. South American plant cutter
26. These may be inflated
27. Streisand musical
28. Fluffy females
29. Ruckus
31. Brit's farewell
32. Corrida cheer
34. Like a big fan
35. Second column, in addition
36. Historical period
38. Western Indian
43. Fluctuate
46. Backbite
48. Gantry of fiction
49. Exterminators' targets
50. Roman port
51. Carpentry fasteners
52. Thing to lend or bend
53. Pesky insects
56. Utilizer
57. "Heroides" author
58. Hawaiian state bird
59. Gaelic
60. North Sea feeder



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7	8		3					5
3	1				4			
					1	9	8	
8	7	1						
					9			
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	3	6	2					
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2					9		6	7

SOLUTION

L	9	E	6	I	S	8	P	Z
8	6	Z	E	P	9	L	S	I
I	P	S	8	L	Z	9	E	6
P	E	8	L	9	I	Z	6	S
Z	L	I	S	6	8	E	9	P
6	S	9	Z	E	P	I	L	8
E	8	6	I	S	L	P	Z	9
9	Z	L	P	8	6	S	I	E
S	I	P	9	Z	E	6	8	L

Complete the grid so that every row and every column contains the numbers 1 through 9. A number is Never repeated in a row or column. In addition every rectangle must contain the numbers 1 through 9

Finance

Oil prices rebound slightly on US data

NEW YORK (AFP) - Global oil prices staged a light rebound on Monday, reversing earlier losses after news of strong durable goods orders in top crude consumer the United States, dealers said.

But prices were tempered by comments from the head of the OPEC cartel saying that crude supplies are plentiful to meet demand in 2013.

In New York trade the main contract, West Texas Intermediate crude for March delivery, rose by 56 cents from Friday to settle at \$96.44 a barrel.

London's benchmark, Brent North Sea crude for delivery in March, added 20 cents to \$113.48 per barrel, after earlier rising to nearly a three-month peak at \$113.80.

Prices were helped by data showing strength in US indus-

try last Month. New orders for durable manufactured goods surged higher in December, led by a jump in commercial aircraft orders, government data showed.

That was the seventh increase in the last eight months, following a 0.7 percent gain in November, and well above the 1.6 percent rise expected by analysts.

"We had decent durable goods orders estimates for December, beating expectations with a 4.6 percent month-on-month increase," said VTB Capital analyst Andrey Kryuchenkov.

Kryuchenkov said though that Brent "also suffered earlier from comments by OPEC Secretary General Abdullah al-Badri on plentiful supplies in the current year."

In a speech in London, Badri complained of excessive speculation in crude markets last year "despite the market being well-supplied, with OECD crude stocks above their five-year average, and with OPEC spare capacity at healthy levels.

"Looking ahead to 2013, the market is expected to remain well-supplied to meet the expected demand growth," he added.

On Friday, Brent oil had struck a three-month peak at \$113.84 on the back of a weaker dollar, upbeat German data and growing optimism over the global economic outlook.

Later this week, traders will switch focus to the outcome of the US Federal Reserve's two-day monetary policy meeting on Wednesday.

IMF grants Mali \$18 mn emergency loan

WASHINGTON (AFP) - The International Monetary Fund agreed Monday to provide a \$18.4 million emergency loan to Mali, a move likely to lead to other donors releasing more funds after having cut off aid following the March 2012 coup.

The IMF executive board approved the loan under the Rapid Credit Facility aiming to help the government bridge a huge budget hole as its fights

off an Islamist insurgency with French help.

Mali mission chief Christian Jozs said the fund was confident that the country, battered by drought, the March coup and now a rebellion by Islamist militants in the north, would stick to efforts at reducing its fiscal deficit and implementing economic reforms.

"We decided to go ahead with the board meeting (to de-

cide the loan) in spite of the foreign military intervention because we could see that the authorities were still committed and eager to implement their program of fiscal prudence."

"At the same time we could also see that donors were prepared to re-engage in Mali and considered this operation of the IMF with Mali a precondition to re-engage."

African migrants pay most to send money home: WB

WASHINGTON (AFP) - African migrants around the world pay more than other groups to send money back home, costing them and their families a hefty \$4 billion a year, the World Bank said Monday.

The development lender said Africa's overseas workers sent close to US\$60 billion in

remittances in 2012, but paid a premium over other migrant groups to do so.

"High transaction costs are cutting into remittances, which are a lifeline for millions of Africans," Gaiv Tata, director of financial inclusion in the World Bank's Africa Region.

"Remittances play a critical role in helping households address immediate needs and also invest in the future, so bringing down remittance prices will have a significant impact on poverty."

Sub-Saharan Africa was the most expensive region in 2012. The average remittance cost there was 12.4 percent, compared with 8.9 percent worldwide and 6.5 percent in South Asia, the lowest cost region, the bank said.


The bank noted that leading developed countries had set a target of 5.0 percent for the av-

erage remittance price by 2014.

"Governments should implement policies to open the remittances market up to competition" to help bring down money transfer prices, said Massimo Cerasino, manager of the Financial Infrastructure and Remittances Service Line at the World Bank.

Banks -- the most expensive remittance service providers -- are often the only channel available to African migrants, the World Bank said, and remittance costs were even higher between African countries.

South Africa was the most expensive destination country in Africa, with prices averaging 20.7 percent, followed closely by Tanzania and Ghana, "due to several factors including limited competition in the market for cross-border payments."



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EU gives Afghanistan 185 mn euros for health, farming



BRUSSELS (AFP) - The EU executive is signing 185 million euros over to Afghanistan on Monday in a bid to boost health services for almost half the country's people and improve farming, including water supply.

Two agreements will be signed between the European Commission and Afghan Finance Minister Omar Zakhilwal, a statement said.

One is to provide basic health care and essential hospital services for 14 million people in 21 provinces, some of them extremely remote.

The agriculture programme, including water management, will focus on rural

areas where about 80 percent of the population depends on farming to make a living.

One of its aims is to help provide the rural population with alternative means of income to poppy cultivation.

"With EU development aid we want and we must help these people to give them hope for a better tomorrow," said European Commissioner for Development Andris Piebalgs.

"This new funding will support Afghanistan in its quest to move from 'transition to transformation' and then to a self-sustainable country," he added.

YESTERDAY'S Crossword Answer



AMIENS (AFP) - The US tyre manufacturer Goodyear plant is pictured on January 26, 2013 in Amiens, northern France. The closing of the plant, threatening 1250 jobs, should be confirmed by Goodyear on January 31.

Glamour marks the opening of the aptly named Glitz Casino in La Cabana Resort



Attractive new Glitz Casino



Hotel Mgt and Board greet Minister of Tourism and President of Parliament



Willy Mosconi of LC Bd, Joe Najir, GM, Paul Croes, Minsiter Oduber

--Eagle Beach has a new casino! "Glitz" is the perfect name for this glittering addition to La Cabana Beach Resort (& Casino now) which was welcomed by Aruba's Minister of Tourism, Transport & Labor, Otmar Oduber and President of Parliament Paul Croes, on Wednesday evening, January 23.

La Cabana GM Joe Najir welcomed the island digni-

taries and Chairman of the Board Willy Mosconi in cutting the ribbon on the elegant, but cozy casino. The former arcade space dedicated to two restaurants and several shops has been converted at the cost of nearly four million dollars into an exciting venue for nighttime excitement, conveniently located to most of the Eagle Beach resorts.

Minister Otmar Oduber

and Parliamentary President Paul Croes personally congratulated La Cabana management on the successful completion of the project. They also thanked them for the practical demonstration of this faith in the Aruban economy and the effort to add a quality venue to its tourism product.

The casino has several banks of the newest slot machines, with a separate area for gaming tables and poker. The Liquid Lounge is a sunken bar offering entertainment in the bandstand and video card games to while away the hours. For the opening night, La Cabana's signature entertainer, Claudius Phillips, provided the mellow sounds.

Casino Manager Chris Scott expressed his gratitude to the board, hotel management and staff along with the many local vendors and construction companies that contributed to the realization of this ambitious project. The end result was obviously appreciated by the many La Cabana owners who are dedicated to the resort. They were feted with an elegant introduction to the beautiful new venue, which proved well worth the wait.

by Rosalie Klein



Welcome from Casino Manager Chris Scott



with newest slot machines



Entertainment by Claudius Phillips



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5 Burgers Aruba: Now your best breakfast bargain!



A favorite stop for a great burger for lunch or dinner has just expanded their hours and menu to offer some of the best breakfast bargains to be found in Palm Beach. Owners Aaron and Rosie Walisever are living their dream: a home on paradise while welcoming all and sundry to their proud undertaking, 5 Burgers Aruba. The couple's fanatical dedication to giving their customers what they really want has resulted in a unique menu from an inter-

nationally known franchise with a "5", which now includes breakfast.

"You never get a second chance to make a first impression," believes Aaron. Upon entering 5 Burgers Aruba in The Village Mall in Palm Beach, one is struck by utterly spotless surroundings and a smiling, friendly, attentive service crew. Of course, the main item on the menu is burgers-the way they were meant to be, thick and juicy,

made fresh daily and 100% pure beef, the kind that made the hamburger a traditional American treat.

However, beginning at 7 a.m., patrons can now order 2 eggs any style, (omelets with 3 fillings are \$7.99) toast and coffee with unlimited refills for the special introductory price of only \$4.49, (\$5.48 with bacon) or All-you-can-eat pancakes, for \$6.99, again, with free refills on fresh coffee. Breakfast is served until 11 a.m. Famous for their fries made from fresh potatoes, Aaron has been working for months on devising the most irresistible home fries recipe, chunky and tender with skins still on; after much testing and tasting, he got the thumbs up from his harshest critic, Rosie; so this is another treat you have to try.

A glance at their burger menu will certainly tempt you to return for lunch or dinner, to sample their famous specialty items such as the Gouda, Farmer's or Man Burger (al-



most 12 ounces of choice beef), and a Western Burger with Aarons' secret-recipe crispy onion rings. All of these can be personalized with an incredible array of toppings, (mushrooms, jala-peño peppers, bacon, cheese, lettuce, tomato... whatever, the list goes on) at absolutely no extra cost.

5 Burger portions are ENORMOUS! Aaron suggests that even their small serving of fries is enough to be shared by

two. He was very amused to watch a famous French chef demonstrating the best way to make fried potatoes on a gourmet cooking show and could only comment "He stole my recipe!"

Try them the English way-with vinegar, and you'll wonder how you ever ate fries without it. This same 5-star chef also swears by Gouda as the best topping for the ideal gourmet cheeseburger.

5 Burgers is now open early until 10-ish at night; delivery is available to both the high-rise and low-rise hotel and beach district at now extra cost for orders over \$50. Enjoy a great lunch without ever leaving the beach by calling 586-3904. However, we suggest you stop by and enjoy their authentic, heartfelt hospitality; it is not unusual for either owner to sit and chat, sharing their knowledge of the island while making sure patrons are happy with their meal.

Sport

Football: US face Canada in World Cup warm-up

HOUSTON (AFP) - The United States face Canada on today in a friendly match that will serve as a warm-up for their World Cup campaign.

The Americans will open a six-team, round-robin North American qualifying tournament in Honduras on February 6.

Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama and Jamaica are also chasing seek one of three berths on offer with the fourth-place team facing the Oceania winner for another spot in Brazil next year.

The US squad will be lacking veteran Los Angeles Galaxy striker Landon Donovan, who has not yet announced if he will continue his career even though Galaxy coach Bruce Arena says he expects Donovan back in Major League Soccer.

US coach Jurgen Klinsmann expects a motivated squad of mostly MLS talent to take the field against Canada.

"Traditionally, it's always been very difficult to shoot these guys up from 0-100 within a couple weeks in January," he said. "Players should understand that if they look after themselves and are really focused on and off the field, then they can achieve a lot in a short period of time."

"Having a chance to become part of this big year and part of our vision toward Brazil in 2014 should really give them a lot of motivation and inner drive to go through

difficult sessions and grow in a short amount of time in a way that they are ready for World Cup qualifying."

Klinsmann has not forgotten a goal-less draw against Canada in a friendly last year in Toronto.

"I was really frustrated after that game, so I'd like to correct that if possible," he said. "It's a nice opportunity for us to (gain) confidence at the end of the day that we are prepared for a World Cup qualifier."

Football: Africa Cup of Nations

JOHANNESBURG (AFP) - Ghana cruised into the 2013 Africa Cup of Nations quarter-finals Monday by hammering Niger 3-0 while Mali joined them with a 1-1 draw against the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Captain Asamoah Gyan, recalled Christian Atsu and defender John Boye scored for the Black Stars while Niger were furious that a legitimate early equaliser from Koffi Dan Kowa was disallowed in Port Elizabeth.

Rocked after conceding a third-minute goal, 2012 bronze medalists Mali fought back to level before the end of the first quarter in Durban and had three late chances to collect maximum points.

Qualification was a pleasant diversion for the troubled west African nation where Malian, African and French troops are fighting armed Islamist groups in the north.

"Our country is in one of the most difficult moments of its history. Malians are regaining control of the north and our qualification will bring joy to the people. I am very proud," said emotional Mali captain Seydou Keita.

Ghana collected seven points, Mali four, DR Congo three and Niger one from a mini-league that failed to match the final-round drama generated by Group A the previous day as hosts South Africa and debutants Cape Verde qualified.

Former winners South Africa face 1972 runners-up Mali at Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban Saturday and four-time champions Ghana tackle Cape Verde in Port Elizabeth earlier the same day.

Niger, who conceded only one goal in matches against

Mali and DR Congo, fell behind after only six minutes at Nelson Mandela Bay Stadium as Gyan fired past Daouda Kassaly.

But the Black Stars were lucky three minutes later when the Senegalese referee disallowed a Niger goal because he wrongly believed goalkeeper Fatau Dauda had been fouled.

Big-screen replays showed Dauda falling awkwardly after colliding with a teammate, and Ghana took advantage of the let-off to double their lead midway through the opening half when Atsu struck.

Any doubts about the outcome were laid to rest four minutes into the second half as Boye, sporting a peroxide cross in his hair, latched on to a rebound and netted.

"We stepped up our game and won against a good Niger team," said Ghana coach Kwesi Appiah, a member of the last Black Stars team to win the Cup of Nations 31 years ago.

Niger coach Gernot Rohr said: "I am proud of my players despite the loss. They displayed courage and the future is bright. We were up against a better, faster team today."

A proud record of making the knockout stages in every Cup of Nations appearance as a coach ended for veteran Frenchman Claude Le Roy when the Congolese were eliminated.

Le Roy was coaching at the tournament a record seventh time having guided Cameroon to two finals, Senegal to fourth place and the quarter-finals, Ghana to third place and DR



Ghana's midfielder Christian Atsu (L) scores a goal against Niger's goalkeeper Daouda Kassaly

Congo to the last eight during a previous spell in charge.

"We had control of the game, but did not create enough dangerous situations and Mali equalised too fast. We did not have enough experience for this tournament," said Le Roy.

Tresor LuaLua Lomana struck a post within 20 seconds of the kick-off for the Leopards and they were awarded a penalty 10 seconds later when Mohamed Lamine Sissoko tripped Yves Diba.

Goalkeeper Mamadou Samassa dived the right way, but could not prevent Dieumerici Mbokani scoring off a shot delivered with perfect

height and power to the delight of many Congolese supporters.

Comical defending allowed Mali to level after 14 minutes as several attempts to clear the ball were botched and when it was cut back to Mahamadou Samassa he made no mistake.

But the game steadily faded as a spectacle and Mali came closest to winning in the second half through substitutes Kalilou Traore and Cheikh Tidiane Diabate and Keita.

"It was emotionally difficult knowing what was happening in the Ghana game and realising we needed just a point. We need to keep up our intensity," said Mali coach Patrice Carteron.

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NFL: National side sets scoring record in Pro Bowl romp

HONOLULU (AFP) - Seattle's Russell Wilson threw three touchdown passes to lead the National Conference over the American Conference 62-35 in the 43rd National Football League Pro Bowl all-star game on Sunday.

The National Conference, which now leads the all-time rivalry 22-21, set a one-team Pro Bowl scoring record, breaking the mark of 59 set by the American Conference in an 18-point victory over the Nationals last year.

Wilson, a rookie quarterback who helped the Seahawks reach the playoffs, flipped a 28-yard touchdown pass to Doug Martin, a nine-



Houston Texans defensive end J.J. Watt (99) of the AFC attempts to chase down Seahawks quarterback Russell Wilson (3) of the NFC

yard touchdown pass to Larry Fitzgerald and a five-yard touchdown pass to Vincent Jackson.

All three came in the third quarter after the Nationals had taken a 31-14 half-time lead and Wilson's burst sealed the American squad's fate.

"Everybody played hard," Wilson said. "It was a great week and a fun time."

NFL commissioner Roger Goodell had threatened to end the Pro Bowl after last year if players failed to make a greater effort in the contest, but Wilson hopes others have the chance he did to meet and work alongside older NFL stars.

"I hope they keep the Pro Bowl," Wilson said. "It's special. It really means something."

Players for the San Francisco 49ers and Baltimore Ravens, who meet in next Sunday's Super Bowl, did not take part in the Pro Bowl.

Each player on the winning team made \$50,000, while

each man on the losing side took home \$25,000.

Denver's Peyton Manning, selected to the Pro Bowl for a record 12th time, threw a touchdown for the American side while his brother Eli of the 2012 Super Bowl champion New York Giants threw two touchdown passes for the Nationals.

Cincinnati's A.J. Green caught three touchdown passes for the American Conference and made seven receptions overall for 119 yards.

"I just came out and had fun," Green said. "It's an honor. I go out and work hard and do the best I can."

Minnesota tight end Kyle Rudolph of the Nationals was named the Pro Bowl Most Valuable Player. He made five catches for 122 yards, including a three-yard touchdown catch from Eli Manning to end the first half.

The National Conference's Jackson caught a 36-yard touchdown toss from Drew Brees in addition to the last of Wilson's scoring throws.

NBA: Kobe's passing fancy sparks Lakers over Thunder

LOS ANGELES (AFP) - Kobe Bryant has been making more passes than shots lately and the results have been impressive for the Los Angeles Lakers, who toppled Oklahoma City from the NBA's best record on Sunday.

Bryant scored 21 points, shooting 8-of-12, and added 14 assists and nine rebounds to spark the Lakers over the Thunder 105-96. Bryant also had 14 assists for the Lakers on Friday in a victory over Utah.

The Lakers, who have struggled most of the season with injuries and blending talented newcomers to holdover players, improved to 19-25 while the Thunder fell to 34-

11, stumbling behind San Antonio (36-11) for the overall NBA lead.

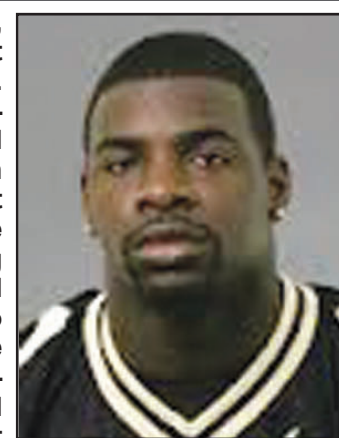
Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Steve Nash scored 17 points while Spanish big man Pau Gasol added 16 in a reserve role and Metta World Peace scored 15 points and grabbed 10 rebounds.

Dwight Howard spent much of the game in foul trouble and finished with eight points and 10 rebounds.

NBA scoring leader Kevin Durant netted a game-high 35 points while Russell Westbrook contributed 17 points with 13 assists. Serge Ibaka and Kendrick Perkins each added 10 points in a losing cause.

Will the NFL still be here in 30 years???

-- Football is a violent sport, and it's that physical aspect of the game that draws fans. No one is going to be passionate about flag football (just look at the interest in the Pro Bowl). Does that mean the demise of the NFL? The league is facing tremendous pressure and scrutiny when it comes to how the game affects the long-term health of its players. It didn't help when word came out this weekend that



President Barack Obama questioned the safety of football, saying he would think long and hard before allowing his son to play. Ravens safety Bernard Pollard predicts this; "Thirty years from now, I don't think it will be in existence. I could be wrong. It's just my opinion, but I think with the direction things are going -- where they [NFL rules makers] want to lighten up, and they're throwing flags and everything else -- there's going to come a point where fans are going to get fed up with it. 'Guys are getting fined, and they're talking about, 'Let's take away the strike zone' and 'Take the pads off' or 'Take the helmets off.' It's going to be a thing where fans aren't going to want to watch it anymore." said Pollard in an interview.

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NBA: 'Hey, mama, I made it' : LeBron at the White House



WASHINGTON (AFP) - Basketball-loving President Barack Obama joined LeBron James and the Miami Heat in putting on a gushing show of mutual admiration Monday as the reigning NBA champions were lauded at the White House.

Obama, a fervent pick-up player and coach of his daughters' teams, praised the Heat as part of the US president's ceremonial duty of honoring top professional and collegiate sports teams.

"I know this is the first trip

for some of these players, but a few of them were here a couple of years ago for a pickup game on my birthday," Obama said.

"Now, I'm not trying to take all the credit ... but I think that it's clear that going up against me prepared them ... it sharpened their skills. It gave them the competitive edge that they needed.

"Part of the reason they came back today is they want another shot at the old guy."

Obama was surrounded by players such as Dwyane

Wade, Mike Miller, Shane Battier and James, the youngest player in NBA history to score 20,000 career points, as he praised the Heat for burying egos in their 2012 championship run.

James grabbed the microphone at the end of the event and, for all his wealth and success, seemed to be pinching himself to be at the White House.

"We just want to thank you ... for allowing us to be, I mean, in the White House. I mean, we're in the White House," he said.

"We're kids from Chicago and Dallas, Texas and Michigan and Ohio and South Dakota, Miami and we're in the White House right now. This is like, 'Hey, Mama, I made it.'"

The Heat beat the Oklahoma City Thunder in the NBA Finals last June, giving the player nicknamed "King James" his first NBA crown. James was also voted the NBA and NBA Finals Most Valuable Player.

Football: Juve slapped with fines, bans after rant

MILAN (AFP) - Champions Juventus were handed a series of bans and fines by Serie A league officials on Monday for displaying aggressive behaviour to a match referee who refused to award a late penalty.

Juve coach Antonio Conte was handed a two-game touchline ban and handed a 10,000 euro fine while the club was fined 50,000 euros for failing to control fans who spat on and lashed out at the match officials.

Juve president Giuseppe Marotta was also banned from carrying out any of his functions until February 18.

Defenders Leonardo Bonucci and Giorgio Chiellini, meanwhile, were handed two and one-game bans respectively accompanied by fines of 10,000 and 5,000 euros.

Both sanctions related to their aggressive behaviour towards the referee at the end of the match.

A statement by Serie A's disciplinary body said: "Juventus are fined 50,000 euros for failing to control fans who spat in the faces and on the clothes of officials as they left the pitch."

Regarding Conte's ban, it added: "Conte is banned for two matches for having confronted the referee in an intimidatory manner on the field of play and questioning his decision with a series of derogatory remarks."

Conte and the entire Juventus team were in uproar at the end of Saturday's match after referee Marco Guida refused to award a last-minute penalty despite the ball coming off the arm of Genoa's Swedish defender Andreas Granqvist.

The match finished 1-1 and although the Bianconeri are still top of the league with a three-point lead on Napoli, the champions have refused to calm the tone of their criticism of Guida.

On Juventus's official website on Sunday Marotta hit out at the fact the referee originates from near Naples.

Conte and Bonucci will now sit out the next two Serie A games, away to Chievo next week and at home to Fiorentina on February 9, while Chiellini will miss the first of those games.



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